

FINAL REPORT
OF THE
SCHOOL SAFETY INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE



Indiana Legislative Services Agency
200 W. Washington Street, Suite 301
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

November, 2013

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2013

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SCHOOL SAFETY INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE

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A copy of this report is available on the Internet. Reports, minutes, and notices are organized by committee. This report and other documents for this Committee can be accessed from the General Assembly Homepage at <http://www.in.gov/legislative/>.

I. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL DIRECTIVE

The Legislative Council directed the Committee to study the following topics:

- (1) How to improve the safety of schools in Indiana.
- (2) Best practices for a school resource officer to employ in order to successfully carry out the officer's responsibilities under IC 20-26-18.2-1(a)(2).

II. INTRODUCTION AND REASONS FOR STUDY

SEA 1-2013 established a procedure that schools may use to establish a school resource officer program and made matching grants available to schools to employ school resource officers, conduct threat assessments, and purchase safety equipment. The Committee was established to allow the General Assembly to continue its focus on school safety during the interim.

III. SUMMARY OF WORK PROGRAM

The Committee met two times during the 2013 interim. The first meeting was on August 29, 2013. The second meeting was on September 24, 2013.

IV. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee heard testimony from the following persons:

- (1) John Hill, Executive Director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, testified concerning the recommendations of the Governor's School Safety Study Group. Mr. Hill also discussed the grants available to schools to fund or partially fund a school resource officer (SRO), and further discussed the grantmaking process.
- (2) Carmel Police Officer D.J. Schoeff, an SRO employed in the Carmel schools, described the role of an SRO.
- (3) Dr. Russell Skiba, Professor of Counseling and Education at Indiana University and Director of the Equity Project at the Indiana University Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, presented academic research on the effect of police officers in schools, which showed that a police presence had both positive and negative effects.
- (4) Joshua Sprunger, Executive Director of NAMI of Indiana, testified that law

enforcement officers need training to understand mentally ill students. Mr. Sprunger noted that mental illness does not lead to a significant increase in violence (data show that mentally ill students are only 1% more likely to be violent), but that mentally ill students were disproportionately victims of school violence.

(5) Dan Shroeder, Marion County Public Defenders Office, testified that having additional law enforcement officers in schools is sometimes problematic. In Marion County, the role of the police officers is often unclear, with the border between school discipline and law enforcement being blurred. Mr. Shroeder testified that the General Assembly should clearly define the role of a SRO, and that discipline and law enforcement functions should remain separate.

(6) Christine Kerl, Marion County Chief Probation Officer, testified that a Marion County pilot project which involved putting probation officers in schools had been very successful, with arrests dropping and expulsions dropping 53%.

(7) Amy Karozos, a member of the Indiana State Bar Association's Civil Rights of Children Committee, gave an overview of the collateral consequences of arrests and juvenile adjudications on students. Ms. Karozos testified that it was important not to criminalize school discipline, and that the Civil Rights of Children Committee was concerned about racial disparities in discipline and enforcement.

(8) Mindi Goodpaster, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Marion County Commission on Youth (MCCOY) and Secretary, Children's Coalition of Indiana, testified that most acts of violence in school were committed by students, not strangers, and that acts of violence in schools were relatively rare when compared to the community outside the school. According to Ms. Goodpaster, SROs are part of a solution to reduce school violence, but other programs, such as an anti-bullying program, are also necessary.

(9) Dr. Danny Tanoos, Vigo County School Superintendent, described how Vigo County Schools worked with the sheriff and police chief to place law enforcement officers in all 28 schools. Under the agreement between the school district, sheriff, and police chief, the school district pays half of the cost of stationing law enforcement officers in the schools. Parents and students are pleased with the results.

(10) Gary Ewing, Vigo County Sheriff, testified that school shootings have changed how schools and law enforcement react to threats to schools because an immediate response is critical.

(11) Duke Bennett, Mayor of Terre Haute, testified that Vigo County schools went from having no protection to having significant protection in a short time.

Creating a good model to protect schools is expensive. Strong community support for safe schools in Terre Haute allows the additional costs to be built into the budget, but it may be necessary for the state to find money for communities which cannot afford to protect their schools.

(12) John Plasse, Terre Haute Police Chief, testified that it is important to have an armed physical presence in the school to deter intruders.

(13) Bill Thomas, Vigo County Councilman, testified that school protection is very important and worth paying for.

(14) Tim Curley, Vigo County Councilman, testified that Vigo County's system is an effective way to protect students, and he described certain aspects of Vigo County's system.

(15) Guy Relford, a firearms expert and attorney focused on firearms law, testified that the General Assembly should consider expanding the self-defense statute to apply specifically to school property.

(16) Paul Hevesy, Area Vice-President, Stanley Security, described Stanley Security's process for designing secure buildings. Mr. Hevesy emphasized the importance of conducting an individualized assessment and approaching school security in a comprehensive manner.

(17) David Edds, Ed.D, retired Greenwood Community Schools Superintendent, described the approach taken by Greenwood Community Schools when they implemented policies to increase school safety.

(18) Kenneth Cook, Ingersoll Rand, described Ingersoll Rand's approach to constructing secure schools and discussed how this approach applies to Greenwood Community Schools.

(19) Matthew Aalsma, Ph.D., Adolescent Medicine-Mental Health, Indiana University School of Medicine, described research showing how adolescent brains are different from adult brains. Dr. Aalsma also described how training law enforcement officers to approach encounters with teenagers can assist law enforcement in de-escalating certain situations.

Senator Hume stated that he intended to introduce legislation to establish statewide safety standards for school construction.

Representative Mahan stated that he would investigate the need for legislation to expand the self-defense statute to apply specifically to school property.

V. COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee made no findings of fact.

The Committee made no recommendations.

WITNESS LIST

John Hill, Executive Director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security
D.J. Schoeff, Carmel Police Department
Dr. Russell Skiba, Professor of Counseling and Education at Indiana University and
Director of the Equity Project at the Indiana University Center for Evaluation and
Education Policy
Joshua Sprunger, Executive Director of NAMI of Indiana
Dan Shroeder, Marion County Public Defenders Office
Christine Kerl, Marion County Chief Probation Officer
Amy Karozos, Indiana State Bar Association's Civil Rights of Children Committee
Mindi Goodpaster, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Marion County Commission
on Youth (MCCOY) and Secretary, Children's Coalition of Indiana
Dr. Danny Tanoos, Vigo County School Superintendent
Gary Ewing, Vigo County Sheriff
Duke Bennett, Terre Haute Mayor
John Plasse, Terre Haute Police Chief
Bill Thomas, Vigo County Councilman
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